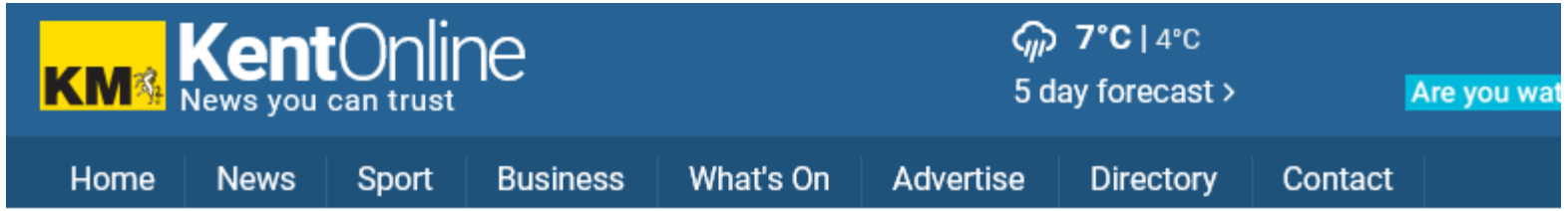

KCC Saving Lives: Mental health support for suicide prevention and reducing self-harm in Kent

KENT TRAVEL NEWS

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By KentOnline reporter **multimediadesk@thekmgroup.co.uk**

Published: 10:10, 17 January 2019 | **Updated:** 11:36, 17 January 2019

SPONSORED EDITORIAL

Community groups from across Kent and Medway have been sharing their plans for new funding for innovative projects to help reduce the numbers of people taking their own lives.

Led by health providers and local authorities from the Kent and Medway Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP), the 27 projects have been awarded grants from Government funding of £98,000, to support innovative programmes designed to prevent suicide and reduce self-

https://www.kentonline.co.uk/ashford/news/joining-together-in-kent-and-medway-to-save-lives-197102/

Nav Mirza from Dads Unlimited, which provides mentoring for men going through family breakdown, said: “This funding will enable us to continue to provide our much-valued mentoring service, as well as wellbeing advice, access to vital talking therapies, and a safe and supportive community for dads across Kent.”

“This innovation grant is designed to fund grassroots programmes to prevent suicides, save lives and reduce self-harm,” added KCC Director for Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark.

“We know that in the right hands, a little can go a long way, and we are delighted at the range of projects that can benefit from this and in turn, they can also help to raise awareness and keep people safe.”

Others, Alex Hurle from Canterbury based Vault Films, says getting funding for films is no easy task.

“The Saving Lives Fund has been a fantastic resource for us, and to be chosen amongst such fantastic projects, all doing vital work for an important cause, is incredibly rewarding. Short films are hugely difficult to fund, and we are incredibly grateful for the opportunity to bring this important film to life.”

NHS suicide prevention app Stay Alive launches in Kent and Medway

KENT TRAVEL NEWS
SIGN ME UP FOR NEWS ALERTS

By Matt Leclere **mleclere@thekmgroup.co.uk**

Read all comments | 11

Published: 15:06, 25 January 2019| **Updated:** 16:40, 25 January 2019

A new suicide prevention app to help people in Kent and Medway has been released by the NHS.

The health service says the 'groundbreaking app' called Stay Alive aims to help people struggling with suicidal thoughts to stay safe in a crisis.

The programme launched on the App Store and Google Play this week and can also be used by friends and family to raise concerns about someone else.

https://www.kentonline.co.uk/thanet/news/app-to-help-reduce-suicide-launched-197652/

NO need to suffer in silence

Four mothers broken by the suffocating loss of sons to suicide this week tell their stories in a attempt to help end the stigma surrounding mental health issues in men.

As the number of people suffering in silence continues to rise, so does the number of suicides in Canterbury, with rates doubling in the last five years.

Alarmingly, 75% of those taking their lives are men, and this week we bring you the tragic story of yet another young man who felt suicide was his only option (see page 6).

In attempt to examine the causes and raise awareness of the help available, the Kentish Gazette is this week launching its own campaign - End the Stigma.

Over the coming months we'll be speaking to various agencies on the frontline of mental health provision in the district, as well as charities doing valuable work to help stem the tide of often avoidable tragedies.

We'll also be examining the overstretched and under-funded mental health services in Kent, with news this week of yet more expected cuts to vital bed numbers (see page 6).

Suicide is the biggest killer of men aged under 45 in the country, and in Canterbury the number of people taking their own lives has risen from 10 in 2013 to 20 in 2017.

KCC's director of Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark, said: "We know that as boys, and into adulthood, men are taught to bottle up their emotions. They are told 'big boys don't cry', to 'man-up' and 'be strong', so when life starts to go wrong they tend to try and cope on their own, without looking for help.

"This may work for a while but sadly for some men it can end with terrible consequences.

"There is hope though, because we do know that if men can be encouraged and supported to talk and open up, then things can start to get better. It's not an overnight solution, but it is the start of a recovery journey."

For every tale of tragedy there is another of a man who, in speaking about his troubles and seeking help, managed to turn his life around.

Only by ending the stigma surrounding mental health issues, particularly in men, can we begin to see more stories with happy endings.

By Gerry Warren
gwarren@thekmgroup.co.uk

I felt like there was nothing we could do

Joy Parkinson with a photo of son Toby

Joy and Barry Parkinson hoped their son Toby would find happiness when he followed his love for music on a course at Canterbury College.

Playing guitar was his main passion, rather than academic studies.

But the depression that had shrouded his teenage years, and seen him spend some time in a mental health unit, eventually became too much.

Tragically, he was found hanged in woods near the house he shared on the Poets Estate in Canterbury. He was just 20.

Speaking from her home in Oxford Street, Westgate, Joy revealed how Toby refused to discuss his mental health problem or receive counselling.

"It felt like there was nothing we could do because he wouldn't talk to us," she said.

"He saw us as the enemy, I think, and because he had moved out to Canterbury we couldn't see the downward spiral he was getting in to.

"We didn't hear much from him and all we knew about his life was what we saw on Facebook."

Joy, 49, a pathology lab technician, believes that while girls will talk about their feelings, boys are far more reluctant to.

"I'm sure that's the case, certainly among their peer group," she said.

She says that Toby's depression was compounded by his excessive drinking but, although he had self-harmed in the past, she never suspected he would take his own life.

"We didn't realise how serious it was, she said.

"When the police came round after Toby was found we were obviously shocked because we never thought that he would actually kill himself.

"But it felt like no one could help him because he wasn't prepared to help himself."

Toby was one of five brothers and, since his death, Joy says that other family friends have discussed how they have become more aware and vigilant about their children's moods and emotions.

She also believes that websites like Facebook, used by so many young people, could play a bigger role in delivering suicide and directing vulnerable people to the relevant support.

Tellingly, the night before his death, Toby had posted "I've come to the conclusion that I'm not going to have a mid-life crisis. My life is a [quarter] crisis."

Jenny Woledge with a photo of her and son William

Jenny found 'healing' from helping others

The horror of finding her son William hanged in their home in Canterbury will never leave Jenny Woledge.

She still regrets not reading the signs on his mental health had deteriorated too far.

But she has found "healing" from the trauma and pain in the work she is now doing to try and reduce suicides in young people.

She welcomes the Gazette's campaign to raise awareness about the issue, which is especially prevalent in young men.

Her determination to prevent future tragedies has led her to train in applied suicide intervention skills and even take a break from her job as an HR manager to travel the country with her workshops.

"I would like to think that I have already had some success in this, which gives me a great deal of comfort," said Jenny, speaking from her home in Nelson Road.

She was racked with feelings of guilt when William died in 2015, having told her he did not want to live anymore.

But she now recognises that a sense of loss of worth is a common theme in suicides among young men.

In his heart-rending note, later found on his mobile phone, William said: "Just know I'm happy now I'm no longer here and I honestly mean this.

"I've been sad too long. I'm so blase about this because I welcome it with a sense and a smile.

"I've consumed my body for nine years and my soul wants to stay but I'm detached now. I can't go on like this."

Jenny said: "It was as if his world had caved in and he lost all sense of being a worthy person."

Now her suicide prevention work takes her all over the country, talking to conferences, schools, universities and even employers about the signs to look for in someone who is suffering depression.

"Unfortunately, with the high number of suicides, we are not getting through to them enough, although there is a great deal of work going on behind the scenes, even in places like barbers' shops and football grounds, where a lot of young men visit.

"The campaign by the Gazette is extremely timely and I wish the newspaper every success with it because anything we can do together to prevent these tragedies is vital."

Jenny welcomes inquiries from groups and organisations about her talks and can be contacted on jennywledge@sky.com.

Jackie Kavanagh with a photo of her son Liam

I don't feel angry with Liam

To many who knew him, Liam Kavanagh was the "life and soul of the party".

But his close family knew that behind his happy go-lucky facade was a man battling bouts of depression and anxiety.

And it tragically culminated with his suicide when the father-of-two hanged himself at Whitstable railway station last April. He was just 31.

His death devastated his close-knit family and, nine months later, mum Jackie says she still feels "numb" and can barely believe he has gone from their lives.

"I took three months off work but I still think I'm on annual leave," she said. "When people ask me how I feel, I can't tell them.

"Liam had a good way of hiding things and took to drink, which probably made things worse. He wasn't perfect but he was devoted to his family and especially his two young children, which is why we have struggled to understand why he did it."

As the time of his death, Chelsea-fan Liam was living with Jackie, 53, at her home in Ivy House Road, Whitstable.

He was getting support from mental health services but Jackie believes it was inadequate and he should have been taken into a secure unit.

"He had tried suicide in the past and when I got his medical records, I was quite shocked to learn it had happened so many times," she said.

"I don't feel angry with Liam but I do believe more could have been done to help him."

Jackie believes the high rate in suicides in men like Liam is a worrying trend that urgently needs attention.

"There is far too many and the numbers are growing," she said.

Jackie, who is a shift leader at a centre for children with special needs, hopes there will be more of a focus on ensuring young men with mental health issues get them as risk.

The family have also been devastated to learn that Liam had researched websites giving detailed information on how to commit suicide.

They are so appalled that his abuser Nicholas has started a petition calling on Internet providers to be forced to take down the sites, which has so far gathered more than 20,000 signatures from around the world.

Jackie says: "I welcome the Kentish Gazette's campaign because if it helps saves one life it will be worth it. I don't want another family to go through what we have."

Pixie Nimmo with a photo of Ryan

Drugs made things worse

Pixie Nimmo prefers to remember the happy times with her son Ryan, when they would laugh and play games together - not the troubled young man who took his own life.

It ended tragically last March when the 22-year-old Canterbury Christ Church University student hanged himself from a tree near their home - leaving a note which read: "I am sorry for everything I have done. Every day is bad. I do not want to live any more. I do not want to hurt anyone any more."

But his suicide was the culmination of years of mental health problems which were aggravated by his drinking and drug taking.

"He began taking drugs because he thought it helped his depression but, of course, it only made things worse," said former nurse Pixie, who manages the Cancer Research shop in Canterbury.

"Yet he had everything to live for. He was extremely bright and studying to be a surgical operating theatre practitioner, which was what he wanted."

But, disturbingly, she later found he had researched websites on how to hang himself.

Pixie, 54, blames Ryan's downfall on "getting in with the wrong crowd" and at his inquest criticised mental health services for not detaining him in a secure unit for treatment where he would have been safe. Instead, having been sectioned following previous attempts to take his life, he was discharged by doctors. A week later, he was dead.

Now Pixie is focusing on keeping his memory alive and creating a lasting legacy, which she hopes will help other young people in emotional turmoil.

She has started fundraising for Ryan's Promise Project which will provide a minibus which can visit various locations in the area offering a drop-in service where anyone with emotional issues can have an informal chat and cup of tea with a trained counsellor.

She said: "Ryan always helped people and believed that working for the NHS and the community was a privilege and an honour.

"The aim is to provide help and support with advice to vulnerable people and to prevent and reduce the risk of suicide. Too many people are taking their lives and it's time to stop."

To support her appeal, go to www.gofundme.com/ryans-promise-project.

KENTISH GAZETTE CAMPAIGN

SPOTLIGHTING OF ISSUE WELCOMED

Chief exec Glenn Douglas and last week's suicide feature

The Kentish Gazette's End the Stigma suicide awareness campaign has been welcomed by a health boss whose organisation has been tasked with building a new service for patients in the future.

Chief executive of the Kent and Medway Sustainability and Transformation Partnership, Glenn Douglas, says he was "intensely moved" after reading the stories of heartbreak and loss in last week's edition.

"Four mothers, each mourning the death by suicide of a much-loved son – it is every parent's nightmare," he said.

"My heart goes out to everyone who has lost someone to suicide, or who may currently be grappling with the sense that the world would be a better place without them.

"I would like to applaud your campaign to raise awareness of suicide and end the stigma.

"It is such an important issue and one where openness is so badly needed."

Kent and Medway is part of a first wave of national suicide prevention funding which granted the organisation £667,000 this year.

It is being used to extend Kent County Council's Release the Pressure campaign so more people become aware of the 24/7 freephone support line.

Mr Douglas said: "Certainly, from the NHS' point of view, one of the key things that would help save lives is people being able to talk and ask each other openly about suicidal thoughts.

"There is no evidence to suggest that asking if someone is thinking of taking their own life might put the idea into their head. So, if we are worried about someone else being potentially suicidal, we need to ask them the question so we can help them get the support that they need.

"In Kent, the higher risk groups are middle-aged men, people who have previously self-harmed and mental health patients. But two thirds of local people who take their own lives are not known to our specialist mental health services, which shows the extent of the challenge.

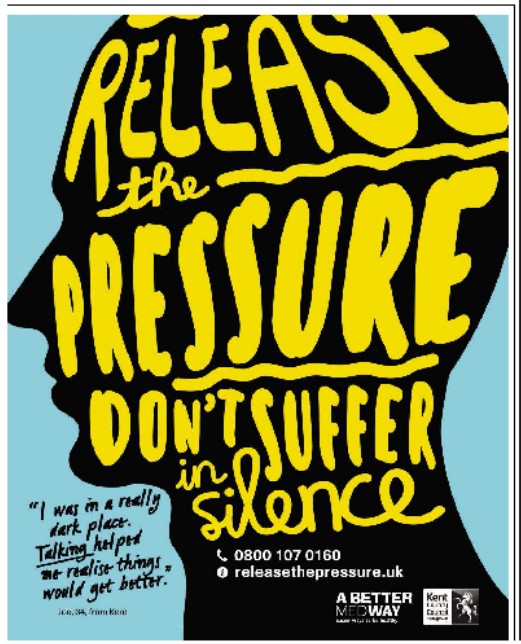
"We want to understand what makes a difference to people who are feeling suicidal and what can help to keep them safe.

"We're also working with Kent County Council's coroners service to analyse more than 150 recent suicide verdicts.

"This will build our understanding of what was happening to the person in the months before their death.

"We hope this will help us identify how we can get advice and help to people, reaching them where they are."

Kent County Council's Release the Pressure campaign urges people to seek help by calling freephone 0800 107 0160 or visiting releasethepressure.uk. Or for confidential support on an emotional issue, call Samaritans on 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org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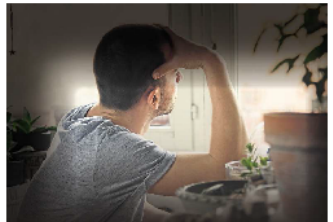
releasethepressure.uk
A BETTER MEDWAY

'Talking about our mental ill health is very important to preventing suicide'

END THE STIGMA
A GAZETTE CAMPAIGN



As the alarming toll of young men taking their own lives rises, the Kentish Gazette continues its campaign to End the Stigma surrounding mental health. Last week, we reported the tragic stories of mothers left devastated by the suicides of their sons. Now, chief reporter Gerry Warren speaks to mental health professionals and organisations about their work to stem the losses, and the support available for those in crisis...

The county's suicide rate may be among the highest in the country with demand on services increasing, but the trust responsible for mental healthcare in Kent says everything is being done to bring it down.

Professor Catherine Kinane, medical director of the Kent and Medway Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT), says: "Every suicide is a tragedy and, as a health and social care system, we would like to prevent every death."

A strategy involving numerous agencies has now been formed, which aims to reduce the stigma and encourage those with depression to talk about their problems and seek help.

She explains: "Last year, members of the royal family talked about their own concerns and we've also had famous sports stars, actors and actresses talking about mental health.

"I think that's very powerful and shows it is something that can happen in your life, but that you can work through it."

She says her organisation's mission is to provide treatment to those with mental disorders through different specialist teams.

"Crisis resolution is just one aspect of what we do, but it's important," she says.

"Treatment is provided at home, and the team works 24 hours a day, seven days a week across the whole of the county.

The level of contact, she says, believes most people prefer to stay at home, where they can be close to family and friends, adding: "It's a better environment in which to recover.

"There has been investment in suicide prevention by NHS England and there's a county-wide suicide prevention strategy involving KMPT, the police and transport agencies.

"We have suicide awareness and prevention training, there's the Release the Pressure campaign.

"We are following up patients who have been discharged to make sure we are offering as much support as we possibly can at the riskiest time."

Professor Kinane says men may be at more risk of taking their own lives, but there are more attempted suicides and self-harm incidents among women historically.

"Reducing the stigma and talking about mental ill health and disorder is a very important part of preventing suicide," she says.

"We have had campaigns over the years, and I think the media, like the Kentish Gazette's campaign, has a very important part to play."

Universities tackling problem as student life is lost every four days

The University of Kent (UKC) has revealed that almost 1,100 students sought counselling for mental anxiety, depression or stress in the last academic year.

Like other campuses, UKC and Canterbury Christ Church University have suffered their share of deaths from suicide.

Nationally, rates are increasing with, on average, a student life lost every four days, according to the Office of National Statistics. Young men are said to make up the majority of those deaths.

In the year leading up to July 2017, 95 university students took their own lives in England and Wales.

The issue of mental health is taken "very seriously" by bosses at both city campuses.

UKC spokesman Dan Worth says: "We have dedicated student support and wellbeing teams that offer free support to all enrolled students experiencing distress arising from psychological, emotional or mental health issues."

Help available also includes specialist practitioners on campus who can offer advice and an outreach wellbeing adviser who can visit students at places where they feel comfortable.

Mr Worth continues: "We provide daily crisis drop in sessions for students to be seen urgently and arrange various events through the year including workshops such as mindfulness, stress and anxiety management, goal setting, coping strategies and an annual Wellbeing Festival.

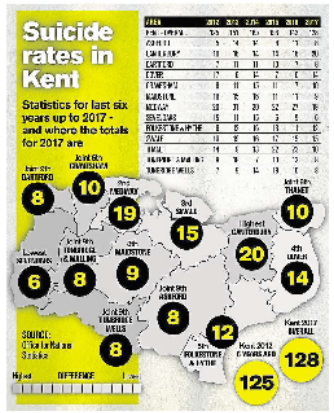
"The university has also invested in a subscription to Big White Wall, which is a 24/7 online mental health and wellbeing service, which offers peer support and directed self-help programmes. It is available to all students throughout their studies.

"We have University Nursing Services on campus (open 24/7 during term time and welcome week) and will be shortly introducing an additional role providing out of hours mental health support at peak times.

"In addition, we work with Kent Union to promote mental health awareness throughout the year and have established a student mental health support group involving the Umbrella Centre.

"We also worked alongside Canterbury Christ Church University to support the two student unions to set-up a Nightline service – a telephone and online listening service run by students, for students."

Canterbury Christ Church has had students end their life


Suicide rates in Kent
Statistics for last six years up to 2017 - and where the totals for 2017 are
SOURCE: Office for National Statistics
DIFFERENCE
Kent 2017 OVERALL
125
128

We are offering as much support as we possibly can at the riskiest time

Professor Catherine Kinane

App support to those struggling

A new suicide prevention app created to help people in distress in Kent and Medway has been released by the NHS.

Launched last week, the health service says the app, called Stay Alive, aims to support people struggling with suicidal thoughts to keep safe in a crisis.

The programme can be downloaded from the App Store and Google Play and also be used by friends and family to raise concerns about someone else.

Along with general advice, it has features which can be customised for mental health sufferers when they are in particularly difficult moments.

Patients can create a mini safety plan to give themselves notes of how to cope and people to call if they do not feel safe.

The app also has a LifeBox feature to upload photos reminding them of reasons to stay alive, and details of people to contact during moments they are thinking about suicide.

The Kent and Medway Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) has worked with a charity called Grassroots Suicide Prevention to develop the app.

This is in addition to the Release the Pressure programme between charities, community groups, Kent County Council and NHS departments throughout Kent.

Mental health programme director for Kent and Medway STP, Lauretta Kavanagh said: "This app will give local people who are having suicidal thoughts easy access to their personal safety plan and reasons to stay alive, round the clock and wherever they are."

Stay Alive is available on the Apple App Store and the Android Google Play.

To find out more about suicide help in Kent visit KCC's Release the Pressure campaign website or call Samaritans on 116 123.

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